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THE HUSKING BEE

A DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

IN ONE ACT

By EVANGELINE CAMPBELL

WITH THE STAGE BUSINESS, CAST OF CHARACTERS, SYNOPSIS OF
PIECE, RELATIVE POSITIONS, STAGE PICTURE, ETC.

HAVERHILL, MASS.
FRANKLIN P. STILES,
1910.



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CAST OF CHARACTERS.

BEN FRANKLIN MORRELL, who owned the farm.
ANN ELIZA MORRELL, Ben's devoted wife and the country doctor.
STEVEN DUNN, who knew the ten commandments.
SALLY POTTS, the famous matchmaker.
SETH BUMPUS, "Set," the country fiddler.
LITTLE EMILY BARKER, "Emmie, the country tomboy.
JUDITH BURRELL, "Handsome Judy," Ben's favorite grand-daughter.
ZEDOC HAYNES, a boy before a man.

Scene—A country barn, Androscoggin County, Maine. *Time*—
Evening, 1868.

Stage Directions—R. means Right of Stage, facing the Audience ;
L. Left ; C. Center ; R. C. Right of Center ; L. C. Left of Center ; D.
Door ; C. D. Center Door ; U. C. Up Center ; D. C. L. Down Center
Left ; D. C. R. Down Center Right.

STAGE SETTING.

Interior of Barn. Wall of barn running across the back of stage
shows an oat scaffold L. C. six and one-half feet high. Oats hanging
over the sides and front of scaffold. Bay R. C. five and one-half feet
high and full of hay. Hay mow R. of bay extending nearly to the
eaves and across the end of the barn. Ladder R. C. near hay mow,
seven and one-half feet long, extending two feet above the running
beam of bay. D. L. C. leading from the barn to the house. Three
empty stalls (or one in use). Harness hanging on peg L. of stalls.
Eight pegs on either side of C. D. Three L. C., five R. C. Lan

terns hanging on pegs either side of C. D. and on second peg L. C. Harness hanging on third peg L. C. near the corner. Trace of corn hanging on second peg R. C. Lantern on third. Wraps on fourth. Corn to be husked on the floor in front of stalls. Four milking stools near corn. Substitute for table, boards on horses, horses two and one-half feet high, three and one-half long. An old chair near harness.

COSTUMES.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN MORRELL—Dark trousers and coat, gray flannel shirt, narrow black string tie, red bandanna handkerchief, long legged boots.

ANN ELIZY MORRELL—Redish brown calico dress, three cornered white handkerchief, large gold brooch, side combs, gray stockings, slippers without heels, gold hoops in ears.

STEVEN DUNN—Medium dark gray suit, white shirt somewhat soiled, stand-up collar, green tie, long legged boots.

EMILY—Red and green plaid gingham dress, red flannel drawers drawn into elastic just below the knees, black woolen stockings, common leather shoes.

SETH BUMPUS—Brown homespun suit, striped flannel shirt, black felt hat, knitted gray worsted gloves, silver watch and chain, red stockings, ordinary country shoes, leather shoe strings.

SALLY POTTS—Brown plaid dress (very large plaid), white embroidered collar, cameo brooch, long gold chain, gold watch, cloth shoes with elastic gussets, red stockings, side combs, large hoop skirt.

"JUDY"—Plain white muslin dress, bright plaid sash, black stockings, good looking button boots, plaid ribbon tied on her hair.

ZEDOC HAYNES—Good looking black suit, white shirt, turn down collar, blue and gray striped satin tie, derby hat, brown kid gloves.

PROPERTIES.

Fiddle for SETH and an old chair. Eleven eggs for EMMIE and some twine string. Large pewter pitcher, cider, apples, cornballs, doughnuts, cheese, glasses, four plates, trace of corn, bushel basket and corn (with husks on) enough to fill basket. Four milking stools a goad with brad in end, ladder, four lanterns.

TIME IN REPRESENTATION—TWENTY MINUTES.

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS.

BEN FRANKLIN MORRELL, of robust form, tall, and a distinguished rural type, firm temper, but a just man.

ANN ELIZY MORRELL, short and somewhat stout, kind and motherly.

STEVEN DUNN, rather inferior looking, bald head, with a fringe of red hair, smooth face. Always had his chew of tobacco between the lower jaw and cheek ready for use. A little penurious and inquisitive.

SALLY POTTS, tall and very thin, long upper lip and slight moustache, curls that reach to her waist and large hoop skirt.

"LITTLE EMMIE," an ordinary looking country girl about ten years of age, exceedingly full of pranks.

SETH BUMPUS, middle age, medium build, an average country type, eccentric and afraid of matrimony.

JUDY BURRELL, a striking brunette, medium height, rather slight, with a restful, refreshing sweetness of manner.

ZEDOC HAYNES, a strong, wholesome type, honest face and convincing manner.

SYNOPSIS OF PIECE.

BEN FRANKLIN MORRELL and STEVEN DUNN are rival farmers; good friends, but somewhat antagonistic. STEVE knows the ten commandments as well as anyone, but regardless of what is forbidden in the eighth, doesn't keep his cows out of BEN's corn. ANN ELIZY, through the goodness of her heart, always has a remedy for the sick. "LITTLE EMMIE," BEN's granddaughter and a typical tomboy, climbs to the oat scaffold to enjoy the dancing, and although told by her grandfather "not to come down until she is wanted," gets excited when he shouts "fiddle 'r up, Set," and comes down head first into BEN's arms, and disarranges SALLY POTT's wonderful curls. BEN shakes her out as one would a rag doll, and sets her on the table near the country spread, and she keeps him watching out. SALLY is a spinster who likes to see lovers wed, regardless of what other people think. "HANDSOME JUDY" innocently meets her lover after a separation of two years. Notwithstanding the fact that BEN is displeased, he will not "let a boy of twenty-two be a bigger man than himself at seventy," and unites the lovers.

THE HUSKING BEE

BEN. [*Arranging the corn. Enter ANN ELIZY, C. D., with plate of apples and plate of doughnuts, and puts them on table.*] It's goin' ter rain, Ann Elizy, shure's guns.

ANN ELIZY. You're er good weather prophet, Ben, but you miss it now'n then.

BEN. [*Enter STEVEN small door L.*] Is't rainin' Steve?"

STEVE. [*Approaching BEN.*] Not yit. It looks kinder threaten. It looks showery off o'er Brown's Hill. Spose you've been er cookin' all day, Ann Elizy.

ANN ELIZY. [*Turns to look at STEVE, rests hand on right hip.*] Laws no. I cooked most everything yisterdy. I'm like the old woman who'd rather be ready 'n not go than go 'n not be ready. Where's Nancy; ain't she comin'?

STEVE. Nancy's kinder used up with the teeth ache ter night.

ANN ELIZY. Tell 'er to fill up the holes with ground cloves, and hold some rum in 'er mouth. [*Turns to BEN.*] We won't hev much huskin' done ter night, I'm thinkin', Ben.

BEN. [*Standing up.*] Well, Ann Elizy, that wouldn't happen if all the folks in the neighborhood come, for there ain't much corn ter husk. By the way, Steve. I drove yer infernal cows out er my corn three times ter day. I won't hev corn enuf left ter make the Thanksgivin' Johnny cake. [*Exit ANN ELIZY C. D.*]

STEVE. Why don't ye sell that field ter me?

BEN. What'n thunder's the use er buyin' it when yer gettin' all the corn an' grass fer nuthin'. Steve, do ye know what's forbidden in the eighth commandment?

STEVE. [*Wincing a little.*] Yes, Ben, I know the ten commandments as well as anybody. [*Hesitatingly.*] The eighth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth or may unjustly hinder our own or our neighbors' wealth, or outward estate.

BEN. [*With a shrug of his shoulders and a little chuckle.*] You believe in knowin' um, if ye don't believe in livin' up to um, hey. [*Enter Sally and Seth, small door L., advance to C., SALLY and BEN shake hands, STEVEN and SETH.*] How'd do, Sally. How'd do, Seth. Well, which one un ye brought the other? [*Enter ANN ELIZY, C. D., looks surprised.*]

ANN ELIZY. Well, well, this looks s'picious like, peers ter me.

SETH. [*Laughing; shakes his head, good naturedly.*] Never kin tell, Ann Elizy.

ANN ELIZY. [*Sally begins to remove her wraps.*] Hang yer things on yonder peg. Lay yer fiddle down here, "Set," [*pointing to end of table at her right. SALLY hangs her wraps on peg R. of ladder, comes to table and looks at doughnuts and smells of one.*] An seein' you'n Sally's extry friendly ter night, I'll hang yer hat on Sally's peg. [*Nods at SETH with a knowing wink.*] P'raps ye'll go her way ter night. Why! [*With look of sympathy.*] Have ye gut er stiff neck? [*Moving his head carefully.*]

SETH. No; I've got er durnation sore bile on the back uv it, an don't know's I ken fiddle much.

BEN. [*Listening to the thunder, distant and rumbling.*] I'm thinkin' there won't be much fiddlin' ter do.

SALLY. [*Looking somewhat disgusted at corn.*] Where's yer corn, Ben; gut more'n that, aint ye? We kin husk that before the evenin' begins.

EMMIE. [*Enter C. D., goes to BEN, half afraid and almost crying, looks up into his face and takes hold of his hand.*] Grandpa, can I sit up and see you dance if I'll be good?

BEN. [*Leaning over and speaking rather sternly.*] If yer want ter set up [*motioning to oat scaffold*] git right up on the oat scuffle. Keep yer eyes open, yer mouth shut, and don't come down [*shaking his finger in her face*] til yer wanted.

EMMIE. [*Looking at scaffold, then at BEN.*] All right, grandpa. [*Goes up the ladder, walks on cross beam of bay and climbs to the scaffold; sits down near the edge.*]

SETH. [*Jokingly.*] See you've gut er chew in, Steve; gut an extry one?

SIEVE. [*Feeling of both trousers pockets.*] Aint gut er crumb, "Set."

ANN ELIZY. Steve always has his cud in, "Set."

STEVE. They say er good cow never loses er cud, Ann Elizy.

BEN. [*Having private conversation with SALLY; looks at SETH.*] Steve carries his tobaccer where the neighbors can't borry.

STEVE. Zed's goin' ter drop round er little later. Wish Judy was here.

BEN. [*Gets a little restless.*] Hold on, Steve; don't go too fur. You know how I've felt about Zed and Judy for a long time. [*SALLY, ANN ELIZY and SETH gossiping in whispers D. C. L. EMMIE lays face down on the scaffold and listens.*]

STEVEN. [*Hands in trousers pockets, walks a little U. C. nearer BEN, and talks earnestly.*] Zed's all right now, Ben; straight's er

string an smart at his business. Why, he's goin' to work fur the government soon. He couldn't do that if he wasn't all right every way. [*Growing more convincing and tapping his left palm with his right first finger.*] His father come out all right; couldn't do much better'n leavin' off his bad habits an' joinin' the church'n preachin'. An' he was er [*slapping his left palm violently with his right hand*] good preacher, too. [*Nodding his head to confirm his statement.*] Zed's lookin' fine; he's grown powerful good lookin' since you've seen him.

BEN. [*Calm, but firm; clasps his hands behind him and looks steadily at Steve.*] It's not only 'cause his father dranked; you know's well's I that Judy's father killed her mother, jist through drink, and I've sworn never ter see Judy marry any man that ever used liquor. [*Turns and walks D. C. SALLY meets him, SIEVE joins ANN ELIZY and SETH.*]

SALLY. [*Innocently.*] Wouldn't ye jist like to see Judy pop in here?

BEN. [*Somewhat irritated.*] No, Sally, I wouldn't under the circumstances; 'twould only stir things up agin.

ANN ELIZY. [*Exit C. D., calls from beyond.*] Ben, will you'n Steve come in the house er minute? [*Exit STEVE and BEN, C. D.*]

SALLY. *Turning to SETH as he takes his fiddle out of an old green bag.* It's rainin' now; looks like you'd have ter stay all night. [*EMMIE crawls on hands and knees to back of scaffold and hunts for eggs and finds a nest with eleven in it; puts them in her dress skirt, stands up and walks back near the edge, and sits down counting the eggs over and over, and smiling; puts them down on the oats and watches for some one to take them.*] I guess yer glad ye ain't married ter-night.

SETH. [*Sits down on chair, begins to tune his fiddle softly.*] Ter-night? I'm glad every night.

SALLY *places a milking stool near SETH and sits down, clasps her hands just below her knees and looks into his face.*

SALLY. It seems queer ter me, "SET," that you've never gut married going round all over creation. You must uv loved somebody some time. [*Enter Super C. D., with large pewter pitcher full of cider, puts it on table, turns io go. EMMIE attracts his attention, and he holds his cap to get the eggs. He is evidently a farm hand; he can't quite reach. EMMIE thinks quickly, takes off her right shoe and stocking, fills the stocking with the eggs and lowers it down. Exit C. D.*]

SETH. [*Somewhat sadly.*] I loved jist one outside uv my own family, Sally. I buried the best friend I had when I buried her. [*BEN and STEVE about to enter, but wait and listen in alley.*] She was faithful ter me all the days uv her life, and there'l never be another ter take 'er place. [*STEVE looks wise, whispers and nods his head to BEN.*]

SALLY. [*Growing interested.*] There's er lot er good ones left.

SETH. Well, that may be, but there'll never be another that will think so much of me. [STEVE *looks sad and shakes his head sympathetically.*] She used ter come and kiss me and wake me up every mornin'.

SALLY. Oh, she lived with you?

SETH. [*Still tuning his fiddle.*] She lived with me til she died, and I buried her in my own lot at the foot of what'l be my grave.

SALLY. [*Sorrowfully.*] Do you mind tellin' me her name?

SETH. Lucindy; 'Cindy for short.

SALLY. Lucindy who?

SETH. Bumpus.

SALLY [*much relieved.*] Oh, I see, er relative.

SETH. Well, if she wus, it must ev been a good many generations back; but we wus er like in er good many ways. She liked ter walk with me, an hunt, an I couldn't fiddle ernuf ter suit er.

SALLY. What did she die uv?

SETH. Old age. She was toothless, deaf and almost blind, but I loved er just the same.

SALLY. How old was she, Set?

SETH. Seventeen.

SALLY. [*Showing great surprise.*] Seventeen! What do you mean?

SETH. That's purty old for er dog, Sally. [BEN *slaps STEVE on the shoulder.*]

SALLY. [*Somewhat disgusted.*] A dog!

SETH. Yes, er dog: don't ye spose "Rip Van Winkle" loved his dog "Snyder?"

BEN. [*Enter BEN and STEVE with cornballs and cheese and puts them on table.*] Tune 'er up, "Set," an we'l begin ter husk, an have er good old fashioned sing. [*Enter ANN ELIZY with glasses for cider, puts them on table, goes over to BEN.*]

SETH. What'l ye have, Ben?

BEN. [*All four sitting on the milking stool by the corn.*] Sposen ye give us the "Reaping Song." [SETH *quickly tunes his violin and all four sing while husking.* EMMIE *makes a wreath of oats to wear on her head.*]

"The autumn winds are sighing, sighing in the trees;
The ripened corn is waving, waving in the breeze;
The harvest moon is shining, shining in the night,
Over hill and valley, in floods of silver light."

Exit ANN ELIZY, C. D., others continue to husk, returns in a few seconds with poultice in her hand for SETH.

SETH. Now, what yer got there?

ANN ELIZY. [*Binding poultice around SETH's neck.*] A mullin leaf poultis; it'l take the soreness out right er way. [*Exit SALLY, C. D.*] Don't say er word, Set, but I'm lookin' fer er fuss here er little later. Sally went 'n gut Judy [*EMMIE claps her hands*] this mornin'. She'll see Zed 'n that'l upset Ben.

SETH. Never mind, Ann Elizy. "All's well that ends well." That feels better; much erblied. You're always doin' somethin' for somebody.

BEN. [*Going to the table.*] Come on, "Set," now you're all fixed up, an hev some cider'n doughnuts, an some uv Ann Elizy's gymnasium cheese, 'n there's a heap er performers in it, too.

ANN ELIZY. [*Indignantly.*] There ain't any skippers 'n that cheese, Ben.

BEN. [*All go to the table and take a doughnut and some cheese each, and sit on the milking stools.*] After we fill up we'l hev "Money Musk," an dance er little. Spose Sally's jist as light on her feet as ever. [*Enter SALLY, C. D., helps herself to doughnuts and cheese, sits on stool between SETH and ANN ELIZY.*] But you'n I are gettin' er little stiff, Steve, I reckon. We'll be like Ike Crockett's horse. They say he knew more'n Ike. He knew ernuf ter go ter bed'n Ike didn't. The horse was so stiff in his knees he couldn't lay down, so he leaned up agin the stall and slid down sideways. [*Enter JUDY on tiptoe, C. D. BEN sits back to the door; she puts her hand over his eyes. He feels of her hand carefully.*] Oh, it's you, Judy. [*SALLY shakes her hands gleefully.*] Ye can't fool me; no little hands but yourn could blind me. [*BEN rises.*] Where'n the world did you come from?

JUDY [*clasps her arms about his neck and kisses him fondly two or three times.*] I come with Sally. She went over to school and brought me home just to give you a great big surprise.

BEN. [*Displeased.*] Don't you believe any such nonsense. She's gut another 'great big surprise on her mind ternight.

JUDY. [*Looking disappointed.*] Ain't you glad to see me, grandpa?

BEN. [*Clasping her in his arms.*] Yes, Judy; yer old grandpa hopes the day will never come in this world when he won't be glad ter see ye. [*Turning to SALLY, who is whispering to STEVE.*] Sally, you may think you've done er big thing gittin Judy here ternight. I might er known ye'd do this.

SALLY. [*Triumphantly.*] Ben, you're born, but ye ain't buried yit.

BEN. No, "I may have been nearer death than I am ternight, but death has never been so near to me."

STEVEN. [*Triumphantly.*] Ben, the tenth commandment requir-eth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbor and all that is his."

ZEDOC enters small door L. and stops L. C., with right hand extended, hat in left hand. All greet him, JUDY first.]

ZEDOC. Judy, Uncle Ben; hello old friends one and all.

SALLY. Guess ye won't find many old friends but's powerful glad ter see ye.

ANN ELIZY. [*Holding his right hand, puts her left hand on his right shoulder.*] I guess it seems like old times to git back. [*He continues to hold her hand and looks fondly into her face.*]

ZEDOC. Yes, Aunt Elizy; it brings to my mind these lines from "The Land of Evangeline,"

"Along my father's dikes I roam again,
Among the willows by the river side;
These miles of green I know from hill to tide,
And every creek and river's ruddy stain."

[*Lets go of ANN ELIZY's hand and turns to JUDY.*] And little Judy; she hasn't changed in two long years. [SETH sits down in chair near harness.]

SETH. Choose partners for "Money Musk." [*Tunes his fiddle while set is being formed.*]

ZEDOC. Uncle Ben, may I dance with Judy?

BEN. [*Rather annoyed.*] Why, Zed, I can't very well say no.

[*STEVE and ANN ELIZY move the table further back; ZEDOC hastens to assist. EMMIE motions to him to give her a cornball, and he takes the goad and sticks the brad into one and passes it up to her.*]

ZEDOC. Uncle Ben, I am sorry to displease you tonight. If I had known Judy was going to be here, upon my word I would not have come. [BEN and SALLY take positions for third couple, STEVE and ANN ELIZY second, ZEDOC and JUDY first couple, standing about C., profile to the audience.]

SETH. "Honor to the ladies!" "First couple join hands and swing!" "Pass below!" "Forward six!" "Three quarters round your partners swing!" "Across the set!"

BEN. Steve's squint-eyed in both eyes tonight.

"Forward six!"

BEN. Fiddle er up, "Set."

"Swing to place!" EMMIE gets excited and crawls too near to the edge of the scaffold, and falls into BEN's arms.]

BEN. Here, here, I told ye not to come down til ye was wanted. [*Sets her on the edge of the table.*] Now sit there. [*Hurries back.*]

"Right and left!" [BEN wipes his face with his red bandanna; SALLY and ANN ELIZY get a drink of cider and sit on the stools to rest. SETH gets a drink of cider and a corn ball, passes them to SALLY ANN and ELIZY. puts dish back on table and sits down in his chair.]

STEVE. [*Aside, after drinking some cider.*] Sally is jist as light as ever.

BEN. Yes; Sally always was er good dancer. She's gut small ankles, and that's ginerally er sign. [ZEDOC and JUDY talking confidentially.]

STEVE. Yes, Ben, they are small; and I should jedge they reached pretty nigh up ter her knees. [BEN and STEVE drink some cider. EMMIE puts a doughnut in a glass of cider, BEN takes it quickly out of her hand and puts it in his mouth whole.]

ZEDOC. I must speak to Uncle Ben tonight, Judy; he may feel differently about me now. He must know we love each other better as we older grow, and his heart is big and full of sympathy. [BEN hesitates and lets them talk, but turns away with a deep sigh.]

JUDY. Grandpa will never give his consent, and I couldn't break his heart.

ZEDOC. No, Judy, not that; but I must have one ray of hope to satisfy my heart's hunger. May I speak?

JUDY. Yes, Zed; but don't say anything to make him unhappy. He brought me here when I was a child and alone, and loved me. Now he is getting old and childish; help me to return the love and care he has given me.

ZEDOC. [*With great assurance.*] I swear it, Judy. [*Turning to BEN.*] Uncle Ben, I want to speak with you.

BEN. [*With great decision.*] I've been expecting it, Zed, but it's no use. I promised Judy's mother on her death bed that I would never consent to her marrying a man that ever used liquor. You know rom caused her mother's death, an ter this day I've never gut over it. [*He shows BEN his bank book*]

ZEDOC. Here is my bank book, Uncle Ben, and you will see that I haven't squandered much on drink. I've been saving it to give Judy a little home some day, and I've earned it honest. I know I was foolish for a time, and it looks so to me now, but aren't we all boys before we are men?

BEN. Zed, I b'leve you're honest and I know ye love Judy, [EMMIE goes to sleep on the table] but I can't give er to ye, Zed. I can't part with her now, she's jist like my own. She's all the sunshine there is in the home here, and if I'm wrong I'll soon find it out. [JUDY puts her arm around BEN's waist, he puts his arm about her shoulders. ANN ELIZY spreads SALLY's shawl over EMMIE.]

ZEDOC. Uncle Ben, I have always loved you [*Looking BEN full in the face*] and I have tried for her sake, and because we both love her, to outgrow my boyhood ways and come back to you a man. I won't ask you to give her to me until you think me man enough to be worthy of her and of your consent; but, sometimes, Uncle Ben, a promise is better broken than kept. I'll go back to Washington and

fight for the best that's in me, but when she brings sunshine into your home think of me as having no home, no sunshine, and hungering for it just as you would.

JUDY. [*Raising her tear-stained face to her grandpa's.*] Grandpa, dear grandpa, I'm going to stay with you and grandma; but I want to repeat to you what you taught me when I came here to live, the "Means to preserve mercies." First, be thankful for them; second, receive them as mercies, not as dues; third, [*getting nearer to his face*] prepare to part with them; the fourth I forget. [*Kisses him lovingly and caresses his face.* ZEDOC goes to the table and gets his hat; kisses EMMIE, shakes hands with SALLY, ANN ELIZY and SERH, all standing as he approaches them.]

ZEDOC. Good bye, Uncle Ben; we both believe in a God of justice, and I can wait a little longer—yes, forever—for her. Good bye, Judy, if no one else trusts me you do, and in that trust I'll place my faith. [*Holding her hand.*] Good bye, my friends, and to the country I love so well [*raising his eyes toward Heaven*] God's blessing. [*Lets her hand drop from his and starts to go.*]

BEN. Zed, come back. "A French general surrenders never," but er sensible Yankee knows when he's whipped.* Do you spose I'll let er boy, twenty-two, be er bigger man than I at seventy. Take er, and remember we both believe in er God of justice.** Judy, the fourth "Means to preserve mercies," reads like this, "Expect the continuance of mercies" from God.***

SALLY. [*In a very triumphant voice.*] Zed's caught the bird an Steve's happy, anyway, Ben. [*Steve dances a little jig.*]

BEN. Yes, Sally, that's Steve's funeral jig; but he never dances it when its his funeral.****

*The stars denote first, second, third and fourth climaxes.

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